



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Stephen Stein
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Aviation Safety - Eastern Region

NTSB Accident Number: ERA15FA173
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N50KH; Bell 206 L-1 Helicopter
Accident Location: Saucier, Mississippi
Accident Date: March 30, 2015

Note: The following interviews were documented by the Investigator –In-Charge (IIC), Stephen Stein.

Interview #1 Summary

Brendan Mullen
Surviving Passenger

Interview date and time: May 8, 2015; 0904 EDT

During a follow-up interview, two aural alarms were played for the surviving passenger to confirm if the alarms were heard during the accident. The alarms, in .wav format, were obtained from Textron Aviation, the helicopter manufacturer, and were labeled as "Clip A" and "Clip B." "Clip A" was a copy of the engine out alarm (a fast pulse) and "Clip B" was a copy of the low rpm alarm (a sustained buzz). Both files were e-mailed to the surviving passenger to be played during the telephone interview and their aural alarm identities were not disclosed. The files were repeatedly played for Mr. Mullen who recalled hearing both alarms, which he placed in the following sequence: "Clip B" was heard first followed by "Clip A." He subsequently stated that he could not be certain of their order, but vaguely recalled

According to Mr. Mullen, the accident pilot announced they had lost power immediately after both alarms engaged. He was unable to observe any of the visual indications on the instrument panel at the time of accident. The helicopter made a "pirouette" quarter turn after the loss of

power. Mr. Mullen believed the helicopter "favored Steve's side" (rotated to the left), but he could not confirm with certainty.

Although his head was facing the floor, Mr. Mullen remembered the helicopter impacting the ground "flat."

Mr. Mullen also spoke briefly about the aborted engine start that occurred just before the accident flight. While he was attentive during startup, he did not observe any flames or smoke at the time.

Interview #2 Summary

Brendan Mullen
Surviving Passenger

Interview date and time: September 3, 2015; 0818 PDT

Mr. Mullen stated that he weight approximately 165 lbs with flight gear, boots, and protective equipment. Normally he weighs about 180 lbs with line gear, which he was not carrying during the accident flight.

According to Mr. Mullen, the helicopter departed on the accident flight with full fuel tanks in preparation for 2.5 hours of flight time.

Interview #3 Summary

Brendan Mullen
Surviving Passenger

Interview date and time: September 4, 2015; 0908 PDT

According to Mr. Mullen, they encountered a "hung start" during the engine start up before departing on the accident flight. When they attempted to start the engine Mr. Mullen heard a "whine" and clicking of the "igniter," but "it didn't take." The surviving passenger remarked that he typically hears "click, click, click" of the igniter followed by the flame of the turbine, which did not occur during the first attempt of the accident flight to start the engine.

Mr. Mullen stated that the chip light did not illuminate during the accident flight nor did not hear the pilot mention the chip detector. He stated that he never experienced any prior issues with N50KH and did not recall whether it had ever been down for unscheduled maintenance in the time he had been working with helicopter.

Interview #4 Summary

Brendan Mullen
Surviving Passenger

Interview date and time: February 5, 2016; 1016 PDT

Mr. Mullen was asked to describe the fire that engulfed the helicopter after the crash occurred. According to his statement, they had dropped many balls near the accident site during their last two passes before the helicopter crashed. After the accident, Mr. Mullen heard a steady alarm and smelled some electrical "burn," but did not observe any smoke or flames in the helicopter. After the surviving passenger observed a "wall of flames" coming towards the helicopter he decided to vacate the area to a nearby road. He remained at the crash site for less than 5 minutes before he chose to leave the area.

Interview #5 Summary

Brendan Mullen
Surviving Passenger

Interview date and time: April 5, 2016; 1100 PDT

In an earlier statement, Mr. Mullen reported the presence of some "drift smoke" in the burn area. Mr. Mullen defined "drift smoke" as low volume (light smoke) or smoke you can only smell, but cannot see.

As a follow-up to his earlier recount of the accident, Mr. Mullen stated that he heard the engine spool down and then the pilot notified the crew of the loss of power. The engine sounded like it spooled down from "full flight rpm" to idle, but never went completely quiet. After the engine spooled down he heard two aural alarms that occurred almost simultaneously. The first alarm was a steady alarm, which was immediately followed by a second pulsed alarm at the same frequency.

The surviving passenger estimated that the helicopter was traveling at approximately 50 knots when the suspected loss of power occurred.



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Interview #1 Summary

Dustin Tinnin

Accident Helicopter Fuel Technician for T&M Aviation

Interview date and time: March 29, 2016; 1146 PDT

According to Mr. Tinnin, they use a fuel truck loaded with JP-5 fuel to refuel mission bound helicopters at Wiggins. Mr. Tinnin was responsible for refueling the accident helicopter at Wiggins on the day of the accident flight. He stated that the accident pilot tells him how much fuel is required for the flight; usually around 600-650lbs of fuel. The accident pilot usually doesn't ask him to full the tanks to full capacity. On the day of the accident the pilot returned to the airport "once or twice" to refuel the helicopter. Mr. Tinnin reported that T&M Aviation uses a log to track the quantity of fuel used to refuel the aircraft. These records are retained by T&M Aviation at the company base in Abbeyville, Louisiana. The fuel technician could not recall specifically how much fuel was added to the tanks of the accident helicopter on the day of the accident.



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Interview #1 Summary

Cody Seeger
Pilot, T&M Aviation

Interview date and time: September 3, 2015; 1455 PDT

Mr. Seeger stated that he started with T&M Aviation in 2007 as a pilot assigned to fly prescribed burn missions in a Bell Jet Ranger and later transitioned to the long ranger. He stated that he usually flew N25GH, but added that he had flown N50KH, the accident helicopter, during previous missions. Mr. Seeger described N50KH as the "the nice helicopter...the all star of the fleet" because it was the first helicopter that was converted from a 206 L1 series to a 206 L3 series.

The T&M Aviation employee reported that he knew the accident pilot well and "held him in high esteem." When he experienced a maintenance issue he would usually call the accident pilot for his maintenance expertise. The only significant maintenance issue Mr. Seeger could recall involved an engine chip light, but he could not remember the helicopter that encountered the problem. The issue occurred during the engine start when he observed the engine chip light illuminate. He shut down the helicopter and contacted the accident pilot who described which

chip to inspect. After Mr. Seeger removed some fuzz from the chip detector the helicopter ran fine.

Mr. Seeger was asked to describe whether he ever had any encounters with smoke while flying. The pilot stated that they light the burn area into the wind, so the smoke would blow away from the helicopter. He added that they are "rarely ever on the smoke side of things", but may catch some smoke "here and there." Sometimes you may fly through a "cluster" or "patch" of smoke for only a few seconds at the most.

According to Mr. Seeger, he usually flies about 50 feet above the trees and the airspeed will range from 0 knots to 60 knots.



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Interview #1 Summary

Colleen Ricks
Wife of Accident Pilot

Interview date and time: April 8, 2015; 1446 CDT

According to Mrs. Ricks they had recently moved to Oklahoma in August. The accident pilot returned home on Thursday, March 19, 2015 from work and received a phonecall that night that he would need to return to work Sunday, March 29, 2015 as a relief pilot. On Friday, March 27, 2015, he performed some yard work and subsequently attended a Church conference on Saturday before completing a 12 hour drive to Mississippi for work. The accident pilot called his wife around 2000 and told her he was going to sleep. Mrs. Ricks observed no abnormalities with the pilot's behavior while he was at home and added that her husband slept continuously on the Thursday and Friday night that preceded the accident.

Mrs. Ricks reported that Ron Wolf of T&M Aviation was likely family and that he never overworked her husband.



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Interview #1 Summary

Gerrod Stephen Jordan
Employee, T&M Aviation

Interview date and time: April 2, 2015; 1146 CDT

Mr. Jordan stated that he had been employed as a truck driver with the company for the past "couple of years." He started working with Brandon about 6 months before the accident and shared a residence with the pilot while he was working away from his family. According to Mr. Jordan, the accident pilot arrived on Saturday night, March 28, 2015, around 1930 central daylight time, watched television, and went to bed around 2200. On Sunday, he observed the pilot overlook his helicopter and perform the required flights scheduled for the day. Mr. Jordan stated that he observed no abnormal behavior with the pilot during the time they were together and added that the pilot appeared to maintain normal sleep patterns both Saturday and Sunday night. The witness reported that he got up twice each night to use the restroom and presumes the accident pilot as he didn't see him.



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Interview #1 Summary

Ronald Wolf
President, T&M Aviation

Interview date and time: April 2, 2015; 1330 CDT

According to Mr. Wolf, the aircraft logbooks and flight records were kept onboard the aircraft.

Mr. Wolf reported that he started working with Brandon Ricks, the accident pilot, around 1997 at Provine Helicopters. The following year Mr. Wolf started T&M Aviation and Mr. Ricks came to work for him as a member of the ground crew driving support trucks. He drove trucks and provided services as an aircraft maintenance technician for the first 8 years before he started full time for the company. The accident pilot obtained his private pilot certificate during his first year with T&M Aviation. After about 6 years with the company he obtained an airframe and powerplant certificate. He obtained his helicopter rating through Vortex helicopters. Mr. Ricks was then qualified to ferry aircraft, which he used as an aircraft time builder. In January 2006, Mr. Ricks passed a check ride to fly under the company's part 135 certificate. Mr. Ricks was the company's director of maintenance between 2010 and 2013.

The company assigned one pilot to N25GH and another pilot to N50KH, the accident helicopter. Both pilots' schedules were staggered to ensure they would not exceed their 12 day consecutive duty cycles. Mr. Ricks was off duty for 8 consecutive days before he came back to work on March 29, 2015. The day before the accident, Mr. Ricks completed a 3,000 acre aerial ignition burn in about 4 hours.

The accident helicopter was maintained by T&M Aviation. According to Mr. Wolf, the company employed 4 mechanics who would drive to M24 to complete inspections.